The Builder.

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A FEW weeks ago we referred to a paper, on the arrangement of Lunatic Asylums, read by Mr. Charles Fowler, at the Institute of Architects, on the occasion of his presenting plans and views of the Lunatic Asylum recently erected by him for the county of Devon,—and promised our readers the information it contained, at greater length than was then practicable. We proceed now to fulfil that pledge.

Plans for the Devon Asylum were obtained by competition; and in commencing his remarks, Mr. Fowler gave an account of the course that was pursued in making the selection, which should be recorded.

The magistrates called in the assistance of an eminent architect to examine the plans, with a view to set before the committee in the clearest light their several merits and pretensions. To effect this, he first selected six out of the large number submitted, as being the most worthy of attention; and of these a tabular statement was prepared, shewing their respective contents, in regard to *area* and *accommodation*, in separate columns, under more than twenty different heads, thus bringing the whole into one view, by a close and obvious comparison, so far as might be expressed by *figures*. The result was not a little surprising. Taking the most prominent or tangible points in the table, viz., cubical area of building and estimated cost, it was found the first ranged from 4,325,000 to 1,404,000 cubic feet, and the estimates from 49,500*l.* to 20,000*l.*; but the most remarkable circumstance was, that the *largest quantity* of building was associated with one of the *lowest estimates*: so that dividing in each case the amount of expense by the cubic quantity, it gave a price ranging from 1¼d. to 6d. per foot! Besides this tabular exposé, the architect reported fully upon the respective merits, in regard to arrangement, construction, and the various other considerations, which cannot be expressed by figures, so as to afford the committee the means of forming a competent judgment on the several plans, but not recommending any one in particular. Upon this the committee made their adjudication (*not in favour of the lowest estimate*). The advantage of this course appears to be the preventing the delusion which too often is caused on those occasions, whether intentional or otherwise: it must be evident that this examination could not be effected by the committee or their clerk, since it requires considerable labour and professional acumen; besides that, it is only by means of calculations, and remarks certified on *professional responsibility*, that a solid ground can be obtained upon which the committee may found their judgment; and further, it will be seen, that this course affords a great protection against the injustice that may otherwise be committed by ignorance or design. Thus the proceeding is rendered analogous to the proper course of justice, as administered in the courts, viz., founding the decision upon a thorough investigation of the evidence adduced.

Mr. Fowler then proceeded to describe the construction of the building, as being rather beyond the ordinary scale of solidity, and nearly all *fire-proof*. The walls are of brick, made on the spot, with footings and basements of the coarse sand-stone, from a quarry close at hand. The following abstract of quantities will further serve to shew the nature of the materials employed, viz., upwards of 12,000 cubic feet of granite, in piers, plinths, pavements, stairs, string courses, &c.; 16,100 superficial feet of slate slabs, in cisterns, floors, flat roofs, &c.; 4,170 yards of tiles and cement, in three courses, in flooring and terrace roofs; 2,600 yards of asphalte flooring; 826 external arches, turned with *moulded* bricks, &c. &c.

The expense of the building was within the estimate, and the total outlay much less than in any former instance of this kind, as was shewn by the average cost at per patient, as nearly as could be ascertained, exclusive of land, viz.—

Devon	£115
Surrey	173
Hanwell	162
Maidstone	183
Lincoln (with land)	240
Irish asylums (average)	183

The number of patients provided for is 450. The outlay will be defrayed by a county rate of 1*d. per pound*, on a low rental spread over a period of 14 years.

With reference to the form and arrangement of the building, diagrams, or block plans on the same scale, were exhibited to illustrate the various forms adopted in some of the principal asylums, viz., Hanwell, Bodmin, Wakefield, and those erected by authority of Parliament in Ireland, which are uniform. Engravings of them are annexed, and may afford valuable hints in the arrangement of buildings for other purposes.*

We give also Mr. Fowler's own plan, on the same scale.

With regard to the distribution and arrangement of public buildings, there are some principles common to all those in which a great number of inmates are to be accommodated and managed with order, discipline, and economy, such as hospitals, prisons, workhouses, lunatic asylums, &c. Among the principal objects to be attained are, classification, supervision, light, ventilation, easy communication throughout, not interfering with the distinctness of the respective classes, or the several departments of management, and the following are Mr. Fowler's observations on the subject in his own words:—

"To effect these combined objects by means of any symmetrical arrangement, the considerations of form and distribution become of primary importance; and it may be observed, that in abandoning symmetry to meet some special requirement, it generally happens that the advantage aimed at is more than counterbalanced by other consequences.

The first idea that naturally presents itself is, to place the seat of government and administration in the centre, and to bring each separate portion, or department, into as easy a communication with it as may be compatible with the requisite distinctness or classification. Hence have arisen the various radiating plans, in most of which directness of supervision, and facility of inspection, have been obtained by the sacrifice, more or less, of separateness, light, and ventilation, objects of such vital importance to the welfare of the inmates, that no other considerations can justify their being sacrificed or interfered with. Besides this, it frequently results from radiating plans, where the centre is closely connected with the wings, or approximates nearly to them, that the consequent obliquity of the lines and angles creates great confusion in the forms and details of the plan, and is thus detrimental to convenience and construction.

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The desideratum, therefore, is to obtain the advantages without the sacrifices alluded to, so as to possess concentration without confusion or obscurity. This has been attempted in the instance now adduced (the Devon Asylum), by the introduction of a large semi-circle, embracing within it all the administrative departments, and connected externally with the several radiating buildings, for the separate classes of inmates. The chord of the semi-circle being 264 feet in length, the subdivisions of this range of buildings have each so small a degree, either of curvature or obliquity, as not to detract from the convenience, or interfere with the construction; on the contrary, the outward bend of the front walls of the day rooms gives them the advantage of a more open and cheerful aspect. It will be seen by the plan, that the form and arrangement of the airing-yards, resulting from the radiating figure, are every way advantageous, being spacious, opening outwards to the fields, with every variety of aspect, and with the windows of the circular range looking directly and unobstructedly into the open country. The governor's house, being in the centre of the whole establishment, enables him by means of the circular corridor, to visit each part promptly and directly, without interfering with any other; the same applies to all the officers and attendants. Also the central position of the kitchen and its accessories, whilst it is thus kept quite distinct, and within the surveillance of the governor, is so near to the day rooms (which are all in the semi-circle), that the food can be distributed with the utmost promptitude and facility, to the great comfort of the inmates, and with the least possible labour to the attendants. A striking instance of the reverse of this may be observed at the great establishment at Hanwell.

Before taking a comparative view of the radiating with the rectangular and parallel plans, it may be desirable to advert to some instances of the former, to which objections have justly been made, on grounds that have been avoided in the Devon Asylum; and it is therefore important to point out the distinction.

The district asylums erected under the authority of Parliament in Ireland, form a sort of middle class, partaking of the radiating principle, so far as having oblique buildings mixed with rectangular buildings (see plan); but from the manner in which the former are connected with the centre and each other, they serve to shew the disadvantages of too close concentration, by the waste of room, and, consequently, of expense. One proof of this is the high average rate of cost of these asylums in proportion to the number of patients, although accompanied with a low average or scale of accommodation.

The asylum at Bodmin furnishes perhaps, the most striking instance of the disadvantages that may be incurred by the radiating principle; for there several wings being directly connected with the centre, they are brought so closely together, as to deprive the central parts of any proper proportion of light and air; whilst the centre building, which was designed for the superintendent's residence, is cut up entirely into passage rooms, so deficient in light and convenience, as to be of scarcely any value for domestic purposes. These obvious evils have been adverted to, in one of the reports of the Commissioners of Lunacy, and a sweeping inference thence drawn against all radiating plans, including the Devon Asylum; with a hint in admonition, to architects, to avoid that arrangement in the plans that may be made for the erection of future asylums.

After what has been stated, it will be easy to see the marked distinction between the two plans, thus so summarily associated and condemned; and it may be added, that having been strongly impressed with the objections incurred at Bodmin, I was particularly studious to avoid them in the Devon Asylum."

We considered at the time when we first met with this hasty condemnation of the Devon Asylum, conveyed in a note, by a side wind, as it were, that Mr. Fowler had been ill-treated. Gentlemen commissioners,—remembering that an opinion emanating from such bodies, however little considered and worthless it may be, has weight, and when printed is spread far and wide and long obtains,—should be well informed before they

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